Trial by Fire

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Sequel to "The Virtues of Knocking". Raph's new skills are put to the test in a big way. One-shot.

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Disclaimer *: Not mine. If they were, the Lost Season wouldn't be lost, because I wouldn't be depending on 4kids to not be stupid and would find someone else who would actually let the season be shown here in the US. Or at least get it out on DVD. I mean seriously. :b*

All ranting aside, yay, sequel! This is my first sequel to anything, so it's a new experience. I've had it in mind for a while, since everyone seemed to like the Don/Raph brother bonding in "The Virtues of Knocking". Hopefully this little sequel won't disappoint. I'm pretty happy with it, and I hope everyone else will be too. Anyways, I don't have that much else to say, other than please enjoy!

Raph sighed as he flopped down on the couch, enjoying the rest and listening to Don grumble from the garage. He knew his brother had been planning to build a second Sewer Slider for a while, but with how busy they'd been lately, now was the first time he'd had in ages to actually work on it. Unfortunately, the furor of the past few months —constant patrols, a rise in crime rates, and increased activity from the Foot—meant that Don *also* hadn't had time for visits to the junkyard for supplies. He was obviously completely out of parts, because Raph could hear his brother swear before and after kicking his empty supply bin.

It's probably for the best, he mused, remembering the nasty gash Don had gotten along his leg on their last patrol. He was still favoring it after a Foot ninja got in a lucky shot, and the extra healing time couldn't hurt…but one down meant they all stayed in, given how sketchy things had been. Raph grimaced. The rest was nice, because he was just as tired as his brothers, but it chafed too, especially knowing they were letting all the scumbags of New York get their way while they tried to recover. The only thing he actually had to keep him occupied was, oddly enough, studying; he'd gotten

a lot of hands-on work with injuries since things had picked up, and Don kept pushing him to look up more treatments.

A final clatter came from the garage as Don gave up and limped into the room. "Hey Leo, what's the schedule for tomorrow?" he called into the Lair, glancing over the list in his hands. "I'm totally out of parts for the second Sewer Slider, and I need to know when we can hit the junkyard again."

"Donnie, you talkin' to people who aren't there again?" Raph asked as he craned his head over the back of the couch. "Ya need to work on that, bro."

Don made a face at his brother. "I thought Leo was out here."

Raph frowned and looked at the clock. "He an' Mikey ain't back yet. They've been gone longer than I thought Mikey woulda lasted; ain't one of his marathons on tonight or somethin'?"

"I think it was Spiderman," Don supplied, nodding in remembrance. He limped over to sit beside Raph, wincing as his bad leg bent. "He's been talking about it all week; it's weird that he would be even a little late—"

The ringtone on Raph's Shell Cell startled them both, and Raph snorted as he checked the caller ID. "Speak'a the devil," he quipped as he flicked his phone open and set it on speakerphone. "Yo, Mikey, what's takin' so long? We thought you weren't gonna be out too late —"

" *Raph, we could…kinda use some help, if you're done ranting…"*

Both turtles stiffened at the tired tone of their brother's voice, as well as the noise of fighting in the background. Don grabbed Raph's wrist and pulled the phone closer to himself. "Mikey, what's going on? Where are you?"

" *Got blindsided near Casey's building on our way back, 'couple apartments away. We think they were lookin' for Casey, but they found us instead. There's a crapload of 'em, too."*

Don fiddled with the phone until the tracking map filled the screen, eyeing the blinking dot that was his brother before he limped toward his lab.

Raph scowled and pulled the phone back. "Are you okay, Mikey?"

"' *m alright. I took a bo to the head—hurts like shell—but I'm okay, just a little dizzy. Mommy Leo is freaked about it though, won't let me fight. Told me to call you guys and get you over here. He's gettin' kinda banged up too."*

"You'll have to go by yourself, Raph; my leg still isn't up to that kind of travel," Don shouted to his brother from the lab. "Take your Shell Cell, and I'll grab the Battle Shell and call Casey, and we'll catch you up."

Raph covered the Shell Cell's speaker with his hand. "But Mike said they're hurt—"

Don reappeared and threw a duffel bag at his brother. "That's what this is for. Happy birthday, I got you your very own med bag. It's about time we had more than one. And don't freak out too much. If Mike can still talk and Leo can still fight, they're alright."

"Oh yeah, great use of examples. Even if they *were* hurt, Mike would still be yappin' an' Leo would still be tryin' to play Fearless Leader."

"…Okay, so maybe that *was* a poor example. But still, you get my point."

"Yeah, whatever. Don, this is great an' all, but…" Raph hefted the bag awkwardly. "It's only gonna get in my way. How the shell am I gonna fight with this thing?"

Don stilled and turned to look at Raph. "You're not. That is no longer your job. When you agreed to learn this, you became a medic. The medic's job is not to fight. The medic's job is to let others fight so that they can tend to the wounded. You will go and take care of Mikey, and let Leo take care of whatever enemies remain."

"But Don—"

"This is how it is, Raph," Don said quietly, his eyes boring into Raph's. "You can't have both. You can't be the warrior and the medic. If you stop to fight enemies that others can deal with because you enjoy it or you think you need to prove something, you are failing whoever you are supposed to be saving. Every second you spend pummeling people is another second your patient or patients don't have. I am sending you out because I trust that you can understand that. If I'm wrong, tell me now, because Leo and Mikey might not have the time that such a lapse in judgment would cost them."

The severe tone of Don's voice surprised him, and Raph paused, forcing himself to truly think about what his brother was saying. He frowned slightly; this hadn't been mentioned when he first signed up to learn first aid. Don hadn't told him he wouldn't be able to fight anymore. That was what he did, what he was good at, but…

But I can miss out on one fight if I gotta , he thought grudgingly. *Besides, it ain't like Don's always gonna be outta commission.*

"I got it, Don," Raph said. "No fightin', leave it to Leo." He grimaced at how the words sounded in his mouth and glanced down at the bag. "So do I get my own pigeon puppet too?" he asked wryly, hefting the bag in his arms.

Don huffed. "Oh, shut up. Besides, that puppet helped, didn't it? Anyways, get going." He grabbed the keys from off of the wall and hobbled towards the garage.

Raph frowned. "But your leg—?"

The purple-wearing turtle kept going, waving behind him. "My left leg is the one that's hurt, Raph; I only need my right to drive."

"Oh, right. Okay, I'll see ya there."

Raph shrugged the bag on as he'd seen Don carry it and took off down the tunnels, pulling the headphone attachment off of his phone and jamming it onto his head. Flicking the earpiece, he barked into it. "Mikey, you still there?"

" *Yeah, I'm here,"* Mikey's voice responded over the phone. *"Did you get sick of talkin' to me or something? Least you could've done was put on some hold music."*

"Don an' I had to get some stuff straight. How're you doin'?" Raph asked as he flew up a fire escape and made it to the roofs.

" *Been better. Got one shell of a headache, but 'm alright."*

"And…Leo?" Raph panted, gritting his teeth as he struggled to keep the bag from flopping as he leapt across the rooftops. *I dunno how the hell Don makes carryin' this damn thing look so easy.* "Is he still alright?"

" *I think he's gettin' pretty tired, Raphie…I know I am."*

"You stay awake, Mike. I'll be there in a couple minutes tops. Who're you fightin'?"

" *The same ones we fight every night, Pinky; the ones trying to take over the world!"* Mikey snickered over the phone.

Raph rolled his eyes. "Oh yeah, yer fine if you can still make lame-ass jokes like that." *So it's the Foot again? That's the third frickin' time this week.* "Don's on his way too. He's comin' in the Battle Shell an' tellin' Casey to meet us there. I'll be there first, but they'll be there soon too. How many are left?"

" *About a dozen. Half of what there used to be. I'll keep an eye—Leo!!!* ***Look out!!"***

"Mikey!"

The yells cut off suddenly. Raph winced as he heard Mikey's phone clatter onto the ground through his headphones. "Mikey! Pick up the phone! Mikey? Dammit!" Raph clicked off his own headset and pushed himself for more speed.

A few rooftops later, he saw the Foot as moving shadows on the roof, clear against the ambient light from the streets. Snarling, he yanked the bag off and dropped it on the roof the instant his foot touched down, launching himself into the group with the rebound of the same step.

He'd caught them completely by surprise and tore through half of them before they even thought to defend themselves. It didn't take long; few could stand against Raph's rage, and none could when his brothers' safety was on the line.

After their comrades fell, Raph could sense the remaining three hesitate, then turn to flee into the shadows. He watched them go, adrenaline still raging through his veins.

"Raph…"

Raph spun around at the sound to find Mikey waving at him weakly from near a rooftop storage unit. "Mikey!" He grabbed his bag and slid to his brother's side, looking him over and sighing in relief when he didn't see any blood. He checked his brother's pulse and eyes with shaky hands. "How ya doin'?"

"'m alright," Mikey said impatiently, waving Raph's hands away. "No different. You gotta find Leo."

Raph froze. "Find 'im? What, you *lost* him? What happened?"

"When I dropped the phone, someone was sneakin' up on Leo. I yelled to warn him and tried to get up and help, but…" Mikey shook his head. "Bad idea. I nearly passed out, an' when I could see again, Leo an' half the Foot were gone. Then you got here."

"Where'd you last see 'im?"

Mikey gestured across the roof. "Over there by the fire escape."

Raph nodded. "Okay, we're gonna go find 'im. I ain't leavin' you here —" He broke off as the whisper of feet on the ground caused him to whip around. He snarled at the sight of the Foot who had decided to regroup and attack in surprise. "Bastards," he hissed, brandishing his sai. "Mikey, stay back!" he yelled as he dove forward and bore one Foot to the ground.

"No."

The red-banded turtle turned to see his brother standing shakily and pulling out his own weapons. "What? Mike, you can't—"

"Go find Leo. He needs your help."

Raph shook off his surprise at the serious tone in his younger brother's voice, concentrating on keeping his arms locked as he held down his opponent. " *You* need my help. Yer hurt, shell-for-brains!"

"So's he!" Mikey shot back, knocking a ninja back with a wild swing of his nunchaku. "An' Leo might be worse off than I am! Go! There's only three of 'em."

"Mikey—"

" *Go* , Raph! Donnie taught you all the first aid stuff, right? So go do it!"

Raph froze in indecision, Don's words echoing through his head.

" *When you agreed to learn this, you became a medic. The medic's job is not to fight. The medic's job is to let others fight so that they can tend to the wounded."*

Raph grit his teeth. How the hell was three or four months of medic training supposed to take precedence over sixteen years of fighting first? He never ran from a fight, but—

But he'd promised Don. Raph slammed his sai down and finished off the Foot ninja he was fighting. No matter what Mikey said, he was in bad shape, so Raph was determined to do whatever he could to ensure that there would be one less ninja to get back up and hurt his little brother again. Launching himself to his feet, his grabbed his bag and swung himself over the side of the building. "You got five minutes before I come back to kick yer ass, Mike!"

Mikey flashed a quick grin at Raph as he disappeared over the side, his nunchaku spinning wildly. "I only need two, bro; one for each goon."

With a snarl, Raph flew down the stairs of the fire escape, his conflicting emotions fanning his temper. He passed three moaning bodies on the way down and only paused long enough to strike them and knock them all the way unconscious. Landing hurriedly in the alley, he glanced around. The fist thing he saw was three Foot ninja lying in a jumbled heap around the base of the fire escape. Jerking a sai out of his belt, he crept over, prodding the bodies.

They were dead.

Kneeling down, he looked closer. One had a broken neck and the other two had thin, bloody slits decorating their torsos.

"Leo…" Raph whispered, recognizing his brother's work. Standing, he prowled around the alley before finding a familiar, three-fingered bloody handprint beside a cellar door hanging slightly ajar, its lock destroyed. He pushed the door the rest of the way open and made his way down the stairs silently.

Reaching the bottom of the steps, he froze when his foot met liquid. His heart jumped into his throat when a breath sounded that wasn't his own. "Leo?"

"…Raph?"

The shaky whisper nearly made Raph collapse in relief, and he threw a hand out to the wall, searching for a light switch. He flicked it on desperately when his fingers encountered it and stepped further into the cellar. Blinking against the sudden fluorescence, Raph glanced in the direction Leo's voice had come from.

What he saw almost made him wish he hadn't found his brother.

Leo was sitting against the side wall, out of sight from the staircase. His limbs looked wrong, loose and limp and unlike the smooth, controlled perfection Raph was used to seeing in his brother.

The blood covering Leo's left side and feeding the puddle beneath him looked wrong too.

"Leo." The name rushed out of him like he'd been punched in the gut, and he darted to his older brother on shaky legs.

"Raph…what're you doing here?"

"What the shell do you think? I'm here to help. Mikey called me."

The mention of their youngest brother caused Leo to stir a little. "Mikey…is he alright?" He blinked, trying to focus. "He got hit…his head. He might have a concussion."

"He's fine," Raph hedged after a slight hesitation.

Even in his poor state Leo caught the pause. "Where is he? What's going on?"

Raph avoided his brother's eyes as he set his bag down out of the way of the blood. "He's finishin' up the last of the Foot."

Leo jolted again. "You left him there alone? Raph, he's—"

"Alright," Raph finished, restraining Leo with a hand on his uninjured shoulder. "There was only two after I took care of the others, an' he *told* me to leave. I checked him out real quick, an' he wasn't doin' that bad. Besides, he was right; you need me more." He pulled his hand back once he was sure Leo would stay still and fumbled through his bag, trying to discover where Don had put everything. "How the hell did ya get so messed up anyways?"

A soft hum, crossed between a grumble and a sigh, sounded from Leo's throat. "Too tired. There's been…so much going on lately…No excuse, though…should have been able to handle it…"

Raph frowned. "You've been overworkin' yerself, that's the problem." Reaching out, he began to carefully clean away the blood from Leo's arm and chest, working his way up to his shoulder. Each pass of the towel that didn't uncover an injury loosened the anxious knot in Raph's stomach a little more, and he found he could breathe again when the area over Leo's heart was revealed to be whole and undamaged. "We've had enough shit to deal with recently, an' you've been pushing yerself on top'a that, trainin' all the time."

"Have I had any choice?" Leo asked tiredly. His eyes flickered again. "We have to be at our best, especially with Don…wait, where's Don?"

"Bringin' up the rear. He's gettin' the Battle Shell an' Casey and catchin' us up." Raph finally traced the wound up to Leo's shoulder and grit his teeth. It was a sword wound, mostly clotted but obviously deep, given that it was still bleeding after all this time. Obviously painful too, since Leo hadn't even moved to care for it other than the hand he'd been holding over it. Raph rifled through the bag until his hand met a swatch of gauze and grabbed it, pressing it against the bloody gash as he tried not to panic. *How far gone is he that he didn't even try an' take care'a himself?*

Leo hissed and tensed, a broken moan crawling from his throat. "Raph—"

"Shut up," Raph responded shakily. "I'm gonna—just shut up, alright?"

"Raph…" Leo swallowed and put a hand on Raph's arm. "I'm sorry… it's okay."

"Like hell it is!" Raph snapped. "Look at you! I had t'leave Mikey's busted ass behind in a *fight* to come take care'a *your* busted ass. Nothin' about this is okay." He glanced down at the blood that was reappearing on Leo's side. "An' why the *hell* won't this stop bleedin'?!"

"Went through…" Leo breathed.

"What?"

Leo tilted his head towards his shoulder to indicate his wound. "The sword…it went through."

Raph paled and slid his right hand behind Leo's shoulder, swallowing when his fingers met a wet shard. "It's still in there?"

"Mmm," Leo hummed confirmation. "Broke off when I…did something. Can't remember what. Worked, though. Was going to take care of it…after I rested a bit." He leaned forward and rested his forehead on Raph's shoulder. "Get it out, would you?" he asked faintly.

"Shit, Leo…" Raph breathed shakily, tracing his fingers over the shard. He inched closer to Leo and peered over his shoulder. The piece of metal stuck out a few inches from Leo's skin, piercing right through the tender, exposed part of his back where part of his shell had been torn away.

Damn, that's gotta hurt.

"How deep is it?"

Leo shrugged the shoulder slightly. "Maybe halfway…sword got pulled out partly before it broke—no, before I cut it."

Raph pulled back to look Leo in the face, his gut tightening at the vague nature of Leo's words. "How long have you had this, Leo?"

Another hum. "I…don't know," he answered tiredly. His hand squeezed Raph's arm weakly. "Bit too long, I think."

"Shit," Raph hissed. He raised his hand to Leo's neck, gritting his teeth at the racing pulse he found and looked back down at the blood covering them both now. "Oh hell…Leo, I can't—"

Leo's hand tightened on his arm. "Have to. I trust you, Raph…Don does, too. He wouldn't have sent you if you weren't good 'nough."

"Leo—"

"Raph, I need…to get home. Soon, prob'ly. And Mikey…"

"I know! I know, I just—"

"Calm down," Leo breathed. "'s fine, Raph. Just like with Don. Problem: patient with…puncture wound, weapon still imbedded. First step?"

"Check the pulse an' breathin', then the wound, entry an' exit points," Raph replied, the pattern of question and answer having grown familiar over the past months. He took a deep breath, trying to calm down. Don had taken to blindsiding and quizzing him in such a way at any time of the day or night, interrupting a breakfast conversation to ask him how to treat burns or leaning against the doorway of the dojo while he lifted weights to inquire about setting bones. The process was almost as familiar as a kata by now.

"And…?"

"The shard's still lodged in one side; th'other side's bleedin' pretty heavily."

"Good…do you pull it out?"

"No. Well, depends. Only if you've got the supplies to stop the bleedin'."

"And do you?"

"Yeah."

"Then show me what you do."

Raph grabbed one of the used towels and carefully wrapped it around the shard to protect his hand, then pulled it out in one smooth motion.

The sudden spurt of blood and Leo's sickened groan broke the calm Raph had managed to attain.

"Shit, shit, shit!" Raph scrambled for more gauze, pressing his hands against the wound, his right hand in front, left in back, in a grotesque parody of a hug. He could feel Leo leaning heavily against him. "I'm *sorry* , Leo. Shit, I'm sorry."

"S'alright…" Leo whispered. "Feels…better."

Raph grit his teeth at the wetness seeping into the gauze and swapped it out, pressing harder. *He's gonna frickin' bleed out—*

Leo coughed and Raph stiffened at the feeling of wetness on his neck. "Leo—"

"S'okay. Not a big deal."

"Yer such a damn liar," Raph whispered, trying not to think about his brother coughing up blood when he couldn't stand to lose any more as it was. He became aware of himself shaking as he reached for

Leo's neck and traced over the veins he knew were under the skin, pressing down where Don had shown him in order to slow blood flow. A second later his hand was back at Leo's shoulder, and soon both of them were trembling. "Dammit, Leo—don't—"

"Don' worry, 'm not…goin' anywhere. Doin' great, Raph…"

"It—it's stoppin'. It'll be okay." Raph squeezed harder, pressing Leo closer. "We'll get ya home to Donnie, an' he'll fix it, it'll be fine." He tried not to scream, his head aching as his mind raced over dozens of things to do, things to try, things Don might have stashed away in that miracle bag of his…things he couldn't get to, because if he moved his hand, Leo's shoulder would do that fountain spurt again, and Raph could hardly stomach staring at what blood was already on the wall. "It'll be fine," he grit out.

"'Course it will," Leo agreed softly, nodding slightly against Raph's shoulder. "Proud of you…" he murmured suddenly, leaning more heavily against Raph, his breath hitching. "You're…good at this. Didn't think…surprised me, act'lly, but…proud of you…"

Leo's breathing slowed more and Raph shook his brother slightly. "Leo, don't—ah shit, shit, please, bro, just—"

"Raphie?"

He craned his head towards the stairs to see Mikey stumbling down them and wanted to scream at the unfairness of it all when he saw more blood on his youngest brother. " *Mikey*— "

Something in his voice must have betrayed his desperation, because Mikey hurried over, shaking his head. "It's okay, Raph, this is theirs. I'm kinda tired, but that's it." He knelt down beside them, eyes wide and looking younger than ever. "Leo, is he…?"

Raph shook his head, trying to focus on the weak breaths he still felt on his shoulder instead of the strangling panic that was trying to

force a scream out of his throat. "I—he—I dunno what to do, I just—
"

"'m fine…" came the weak whisper. "Just a…scratch…"

Mikey reached out and gripped Leo's hand, glancing up at Raph worriedly. "He's cold…"

A scream started pushing its way into Raph's mouth, wanting to be unleashed at his little brother for pointing out something like that. *I know he's cold an' I can explain it but I can't do shit about it because I have no blood or fluid to replace that damn* ***pool*** *Leo's lost and where the* ***hell*** *is Don?* "I know," he gritted out, swallowing the scream.

"Donnie'll be here soon, don't worry," Mikey said with a yawn, scooting beside Raph.

Raph grit his teeth until they creaked and headbutted his brother. "Stay awake, Mikey."

The youngest stirred and nodded automatically. "I'm okay, really. Just a little tired. And dizzy. But I'm okay."

Medical facts and jargon flew through Raph's head, and he wondered if he shook it hard enough if a solution to the monumental shit-fest that he'd landed himself in would shake itself loose and tell him how to fix things. *Concussion…talk to him, keep 'im awake…* "What's on tonight?" he asked suddenly.

"What, on TV? Um…aw, shell, *Spiderman!* And it's a marathon, too! I'm missin' the first one, and everyone *knows* that's the best one!"

Raph propped Leo against himself, freeing his right hand temporarily to ghost over the nerves and muscles in the back of Mikey's neck, stimulating his brother. "You stay awake an' I'll let you watch all of 'em. I'll tell Sensei it's doctor's orders, that we gotta keep ya awake 'cause of the concussion. And I'll cancel practice, too."

Mikey's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

"Yeah. But I swear, if you fall asleep on me now, I'm paintin' yer room pink, sendin' hate mail from you to the Justice League, an' usin' all yer comics fer toilet paper."

The blood drained from Mikey's face. "You wouldn't," he whispered in horror.

"Try me," Raph threw back. "You ain't gonna—I won't let you." He retracted his hand and pressed it against Leo's shoulder again. "*Either* of you."

Mikey inched closer. "He'll be fine. Nothin' can kill Leo. He…he's been through worse, Raphie, an' come back kicking."

"'Cause he's usually got Don to take care of him, someone who actually knows what the hell he's doin'," Raph snarled.

"I dunno," Mikey replied quietly. "I think you're good at this. It's kinda weird, but you are."

Raph shook his head. "If I was any good at this, Leo wouldn't be—"

"It's okay, Raphie, we'll—"

Footsteps on the stairs suddenly caught their attention. "Raph? Mikey? You guys down here?"

"Casey!" Mikey turned to grin at the man descending the stairs. "Boy, am I glad to see you!"

"Ditto, man." Casey jogged closer, hesitating when he saw Leo. "Aw man, Leo…Raph, is he…?"

"Get Mikey outta here," Raph croaked, his throat somehow tight and hoarse from all the screaming he didn't do.

"Gotcha." The tall man wrapped one of Mikey's arms around his own shoulders and hefted the youngest turtle off of the floor.

"Ugh…not so fast, Casey, or I'm gonna yak all over the place," Mikey groaned.

Raph began to tremble with relief, their words blending into the buzzing that somehow started filling his ears.

A second, uneven set of footsteps cleared the white noise in his head, and his eyes were fixed on Don's as his brother limped down the stairs. Concern, relief and sympathy filled Don's gaze as he saw his brothers. "Oh, Raph…" he sighed sadly. "I'm sorry."

"Donnie, I don't…he's bleedin'—hemorrhagin', and I…" Raph shook his head and looked down at Leo, his eyes focusing on the slight vibration he could still see in Leo's neck.

A warm hand landed on his shoulder. "Come on, Raph; let's get him home. You did great. Let's go," Don coaxed.

Raph stood numbly, hefting Leo into his arms as Don continued to talk soothingly. "He's too light," he mumbled suddenly.

Don nodded. "He probably is. We'll force feed him when he wakes up, fatten him up a bit, hm?" he cajoled lightly. "For now, small steps. Into the Battle Shell, then we'll get him some fluids—"

"Saline," Raph muttered dully. "Maybe a transfusion…"

"Just the saline, I think; this is probably only a Class II Hemorrhage. And then we'll get them both home and cleaned up."

"Mikey's got a concussion."

"I know, Raph. We'll take care of it."

The ride home seemed to take both an eternity and an instant, a slow painful crawl of watching Leo breathe and shaking Mikey

occasionally, then suddenly finding himself at home with empty arms, bewildered and confused and distantly aware of movement beyond him, running and flashes of red and metal…

And then Don back beside him, like he'd never left, still murmuring quietly as he led him to the bathroom.

The first thing Raph saw and really processed was himself in the mirror, covered with Leo's blood.

The next thing he saw was the inside of the toilet bowl as he rejected everything in his stomach.

After what seemed like an hour of vomiting up what he was sure had been breakfast from *days* ago, Raph became aware of his brother's hand resting lightly against the back of his neck, holding his bandana tails.

"I'm sorry, Raph. I should have warned you it could be like this."

Raph said nothing, but continued to breathe heavily between heaves.

Don sighed and wiped a cold, damp washcloth along Raph's neck and forehead. "I wish it could have been different for you, that you could have had gentler circumstances for your first serious case… especially your first solo case. Mine was a bit easier, in a way; it was a gunshot wound along the side of the leg. That was you, remember?"

"…Yeah. I remember. But—" Another dry heave. "But no way was that yer first case. You'd been sewin' us back together for ages by then."

"I said my first *serious* case," Don reminded his brother. "Everything up 'til then was generally relatively minor; cuts, sprains, the occasional broken bone. Doing stitches and setting broken bones is

worlds away from pulling metal shards out of your brother and trying to prevent hemorrhaging."

Raph shuddered and gave another heave, then spat into the toilet and flushed. He struggled to stand on shaky legs until Don helped him up and over to the sink. After rinsing his mouth out, he raised his head and met Don's eyes in the mirror. "How come you aren't as messed up as I am?" he asked gruffly. "Not now, but when you've been the one treatin' someone? I never see you like this."

Don gave a sad, wry smile. "I was wondering when you'd ask me that."

"What?"

"C'mon," Don said, tugging his brother gently into the kitchen.

Raph wanted to laugh at the strangeness of the situation; his brother was the one that needed help to walk, and yet Raph couldn't help but feel he was the one being supported. He poured a glass of water for both of them and sat down, watching his brother through narrowed eyes. Don's hands didn't shake, his movements didn't waver, and his body communicated none of the shock that Raph's own did, and yet Don had been the one to stitch Leo and Mikey up when they got home. "So? Why are you—"

"Experience and a healthy dose of denial."

"…What? You tellin' me that you've just done it so often that ya don't even care anymore?" Raph asked in disbelief.

Don shook his head. "Hardly. It's called professional detachment. It's a common— *trait* that develops in many, if not most, surgeons over time. It is nearly impossible to operate on people if you focus on your emotions. Love, anger, affection…these can all impair your ability to practice medicine correctly. They can translate into worry and fear, which will cloud your mind and impair your judgment. And in medicine, your thinking and your judgment have to be impeccably

clear. The general reaction to blood is one of fear and the desire to panic. I've done things like this so often that I can almost automatically suppress those reactions and operate with a clear mind."

"Ya never taught me that trick," Raph grumbled, only half-joking.

"I would have if I could," Don said honestly. "But it's something you have to learn for yourself. The ability to be removed and objective, but still care about the life in your hands, is just as important in medicine as having the proper knowledge and skills. Most medical personnel can tell by their first major surgery whether or not they can succeed in the field. It depends on whether they can set aside their worry and doubts and focus only on performing the best they can. Either they lose to their panic, or they push through it like you did."

Raph glowered into his glass. "Where the hell were you standin', Don? I froze. Leo was hurt *bad* , an' Mikey too, an' I just couldn't think. I couldn't leave Mikey to go find Leo, and then I couldn't get that—the sword outta Leo's shoulder." His grip tightened, his tension sending ripples through the water in his hands, transmitting his internal storm into the liquid. "I coulda screwed everything up if Leo hadn't been…Leo." He snorted in self-deprecation. "He was the one messed up, an' he still had it together better'n I did."

"You're right; things could have ended very badly tonight. You could have stayed frozen until it was too late." A gentle hand landed on his arm and squeezed. "But you didn't." Don smiled at his brother. "You recovered. You pushed through your fear and remembered your training, and executed it well. I'm proud of you, Raph."

The red-banded turtle looked up at his brother and felt part of his anger and frustration ease at the pride and understanding in his brother's eyes. He glanced back down, self-conscious. "Thanks," he mumbled, uncomfortable but pleased with the praise. "So, what was that denial stuff you were talking about?"

"Ah." Don's face quirked. "I did get a little off-topic, didn't I? Well, that denial applies to Mikey and Leo."

"Whadda ya mean?"

"I mean that when I operate on them, I don't admit to myself that they are my brothers."

Raph stared at his brother. "What?"

Don sighed tiredly. "It's another level of detachment," he explained. "There's a reason why people are generally dissuaded, if not banned from operating on friends and family in the medical world, Raph; it's because it is nearly impossible to remain calm and collected when the person on the operating table is someone you care about. As you've seen, if you're worrying about failing and losing someone close to you, you're almost guaranteed to make that fear a reality, because you'll freeze up. But if I don't see the faces of brothers that I could lose, just injuries that need to be treated, I'm able to suppress my panic. I'm still not immune to the fear and worry that comes at times like this, though; my reactions just come later than yours."

"But you still aren't as bad."

"I've had more experience than you, Raph. I've done this long enough that I've discovered one of the most important truths about medicine: all you can do is the best you can do. You study and you read and you practice, and you hope like hell that you have enough knowledge and experience when you're called upon. And that's all you can do. No one can ask any more of you than that. And you did very well for your first time."

Raph snorted with laughter.

"What?" Don's face flashed with bewilderment. "What on earth is so funny?"

"You," Raph said, snickering. "Sorry, bro, but ya keep saying 'first time' like yer talkin' about sex."

Don colored slightly. "I can assure you, I'm not."

"I'm just sayin'."

"Surgery is nothing like sex!!"

"'Course not. Sex is a helluva lot more fun."

Don's face flared even more, but he finally caved and chuckled. "You're hopeless. Well, while we're strolling down the path of depravity, let's see…if this was your first time, it must mean you're no longer a surgeon virgin, right?"

Raph nearly choked in surprise at his brother's words, then exploded into laughter, soon followed by Don. The full import of the evening hit them, and shock and reaction fueled their amusement. After a few seconds, Raph quieted abruptly, hunching into himself and casting a guilty look out of the kitchen.

The purple-banded turtle sobered as well, noticing his brother's change in demeanor. "What's wrong?"

"What d'you think? We're sittin' here laughin', and Leo and Mikey are —"

"That's enough," Don said gently, his hand closing firmly on Raph's wrist.

"But Don—"

"You laugh or you cry, bro. Raph, there is no easy way to deal with things like this, for anyone. The reactions vary, but this is still a difficult, painful situation. Times like this always are, whether you're the doctor, the patient, or a bystander. Pain and worry come with the package, but you can and will tear yourself apart if you focus only on what happened or could have happened. Things are alright. Leo is

stable. Mikey wasn't even that badly off to begin with; he's had worse, and you know that. He's happy watching movies with Casey so he'll stay awake. You did everything you could. Everyone came back alive. We can't undo the past, so there is no point in dwelling on it. You've finally gotten a taste of what it's like to be treating someone in the middle of a battlefield, and now you know what to expect for next time, as well as what you still need to work on. Given the situation, things worked out as well as they possibly could have; that's all we can ask for." He patted his brother on the shoulder and stood with a wince to make some coffee.

Raph stared at his reflection in the glass in front of him. Don's words helped. His brother was right; he *had* done everything he could. And while Leo and Mikey were far from fine, they were at least alive and safe at home. He sighed, some of the tension easing out of his shoulders. "So now what?"

Don turned from the coffee pot. "Hmm?"

"What do we do now?"

A bemused expression crossed Don's face at his brother's question. "We wait."

Raph blinked at his brother. "Say what?"

Don blinked back. "We wait," he repeated slowly. "We've done all we can, Raph; the rest is up to Leo and Mikey."

"We *wait* ?" Raph repeated incredulously. "But…but yer always so busy when this happens…"

"Raph, what—" The confusion on Don's face was suddenly replaced with understanding. "Did you think that I don't have to sit around and wait in cases like this?"

"Maybe," Raph admitted, fidgeting under Don's stare. "A little. I mean, yer always doin' something whenever someone gets hurt.

That's part of the reason I said yes to learnin' this stuff."

"Because you thought that then you wouldn't have to wait," Don said slowly, his voice odd and slow.

Raph scowled at his brother's tone defensively. "Look, Don, if there's something you wanna say—"

"Take it easy, I just—I didn't know you thought that." Don rubbed a hand over his face. "Raph, *I* still have to wait just like the rest of you. Being the one to take care of the medical aspects of our life doesn't free me from that. Yes, I stay busy a while longer, but after a certain point, there is nothing else you can do *but* wait. What I told you before is true; this job has the perk of equipping you to take of whoever's hurt, and it gives you the certainty that they're being taken care of adequately because they're in your hands and no one else's. And you *do* get to stay busy a while longer. But after the last stitches are set and everything is cleaned up…"

"You go right back to waiting," Raph sighed. "Damnit."

Don watched his brother carefully. "You thought it would be different?"

"I guess. Easier, maybe; I dunno. Yeah, I'd have ta sew you guys back up, but I'd at least be *doing* somethin', not just sitting around and waitin' and bein' useless." He frowned. "I mean, whenever one of us gets hurt, we never see you; yer always outta sight, so I figured you were busy doin' things while we just waited."

Don sighed. "You never…? I suppose it might seem like that. Raph, you rarely see me because yes, most of the time I am busy tending to whoever's hurt. But once they're alright, you don't see me because I don't *want* to be seen. Not at that time."

Raph stared at his brother. "What are you talkin' about?"

A wry, tired smile lifted the corners of Don's mouth. "I don't know if you've noticed, brother mine, but we are not the easiest family to be around when someone's injured. You take your worry and fear and cover it with anger, and you don't want anyone near you even though you're afraid to let any of us out of your sight. All you want to do is take out your frustrations on your punching bag, since you're too worried to leave, but you don't want to talk. You prefer to deal with those situations on your own, even though it's not the healthiest way of going about things. I avoid you because it's likely to make me tense and upset as well, and that won't help anything. Also, you make me think that I should be more distressed than I am, and the thought that my desensitization has spread so far is… uncomfortable."

He took a drink of his coffee and continued. "Mikey gets even more worried than you do and hovers, around whoever's hurt and around anyone who isn't. He needs to see everyone, to know that everyone else is unharmed, and to constantly reassure himself that whoever is hurt is at least stable, even if they're not well. Since I'm the one treating everybody, he normally comes to me, because he knows that I'll have the answers about everyone's conditions. But one reassurance is rarely enough, so he keeps coming back to check. That tends to wear on my already strung out nerves, and I sometimes end up snapping at him, which he doesn't deserve."

"Sometimes he only listens when ya yell at 'im," Raph pointed out

Don shook his head. "Yelling at my brother for his concern over another brother makes me scum. And just like you, he reminds me that I should feel hurt and fear more than I do. Even though I know my reaction is just repressed, it's hard to not wonder what's wrong with me when my younger brother can hardly sit still for his worry, and there I am calmly straightening the infirmary."

Raph watched his brother, whose eyes were pinned to his hands.

"And Leo…" Don laughed softly. "He's rarely one of the ones waiting since he's always throwing himself into things for our sakes, but

when he isn't hurt, he's almost enough to drive me over the edge. He gets so worried and feels guilty over whoever's hurt, and even if he tries to hide it, he nearly vibrates with it. He hovers and offers to help, tries to take the blame on himself, and I can only assure him it's not his fault so many times before I snap at him like I want to snap at Mikey. And he'll never think it's *me* who has the problem; he'll just automatically assume I'm mad at him for "failing" and "letting" one of us get hurt, and he'll apologize and let his undeserved guilt carve away at his insides even more."

"Don…"

"So I avoid you," Don said with level easiness. "And I do it out of selfishness, even if I try to make myself feel better by saying it's for your sakes as well."

"What…why didn't you say anythin'?"

"What *could* I say, Raph?" Don asked, looking up at his brother tiredly. "What, exactly? Tell you to stop being angry that this kind of thing happens to us because we choose to live this kind of life? Tell Mikey to stop worrying so much about our injured brother because he's making me feel bad? Tell Leo to stop feeling guilty over the fact that we got hurt as a result of our own choices?" He snorted derisively. "Actually, I *could* say the last one, but it would be just as big of a waste of my time as trying to say the other two, and do just as little."

"You...ya still shoulda said somethin', Don."

"Maybe." Don sipped his coffee slowly. "But as much of a trial as this is sometimes, I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't really handle leaving any of you in anyone else's hands, or not doing anything when I knew I could. It gets…hard sometimes, especially that I know that all of this—the fights we get into that we get injured in, and that I always patch everyone up—is by choice, but I don't think I could ever really stop. I just have to keep telling myself that I chose this, and that you guys don't understand what it's like to be in

the operating room rather than the waiting room, so to speak." He paused and glanced up, looking at Raph thoughtfully. "Well, you do, so maybe that will help…"

Raph frowned, trying to keep up with how much this meant to his brother. There was so damn much that none of them ever really said to each other. "Donnie…?"

"It's nothing, Raph." Don finished the rest of his coffee and levered himself to his feet with a moan, depositing his cup by the counter as he headed for the lab. "Get some sleep, bro; the shock of tonight is going to hit you pretty soon, and considering that it's coming on top of everything else, it'll hit pretty hard."

"Yeah, sure." Raph followed his brother as Don paused behind Mikey, running a hand over the bandages on his head and smiling at his younger brother.

Mikey made a face up at them and stuck his tongue out at Raph. "I'm still awake, Raph; stay away from my room."

"For now," Raph agreed. "But I'll be checkin' with Case to make sure you stay that way."

"Your bedside manner sucks," Mikey whined as he looked back to the screen.

Don raised an eyebrow as Raph helped him to his lab. "What was that about?"

Raph shrugged. "Just an…agreement I made with Mikey."

"You're applying extortion to medicine," Don sighed. "I should never have taught you this stuff."

"Hey, you have your way, I have mine," Raph grinned.

Don shook his head. When they arrived in the lab and stopped to look at Leo, Don's hand tightened on Raph's arm.

"Raph."

"Yeah?"

" *Should* I have taught you this? Or…was I wrong to? I'm not asking because I'm disappointed, I'm actually rather proud, I just…do you still wish you'd asked me about this? Will you continue? Knowing what you know now?"

Raph stilled and looked at his pale, unconscious brother. He remembered the nights Don had nagged him out of hanging with Casey to go over wrapping burns, of the hours spent memorizing treatments and medicines. He recalled how tonight had felt, finding Leo like he had and knowing that he was completely responsible for whether or not his brother survived. The weight of that responsibility, the fear of forgetting something or somehow doing it wrong, the—

The realization that he was looking at his living, breathing brother, who might not have made it had he not been there.

"Knowin' what I know now?" Raph repeated.

"Yeah."

"In a heartbeat," he said firmly. "I don't really wanna go through anythin' like tonight again, but—I don't think I'd wanna go back, don't think I *could* go back to doin' nothin' when I knew I could be doin' somethin'," he explained with a small smirk. "'Sides, I've put way too much time into learnin' this shit to not use it."

Don smiled, seeming to relax a bit. "I'm glad to hear it," he said softly. "It's a heavy burden, but I think it will be easier to bear, spread across two pairs of shoulders."

"A heavy burden, huh?" Raph heard Mikey laughing from the den and watched as Leo's plastron rose and fell gently. He smiled and tugged Don closer, draping an arm around his shoulders and rubbing his head in a half-hearted noogie.

"I dunno, Donnie; right now, it seems pretty light."

A/N: So, what do you think? I've had a sequel in mind since I wrote "The Virtues of Knocking," so I really hope all the thought I put into it was worth it. I really wanted to give Raph the chance to put his skills to use, but I also wanted that chance to be solo; otherwise, it'd be Raph helping Don, not Raph getting a taste of what he's really asked for and getting a chance to help like he wants. And Don needs more people to understand firsthand the kind of pressure that he's always under; the poor guy is ridiculously underappreciated.

And before anyone asks, I had a reason why I portrayed Don as I did, in the way of what he does when people are hurt. Don is a very strong, wonderfully well-adjusted individual, but there is no way that someone as gentle-natured and empathetic as he is could have to play doctor as often as he does and not be deeply affected by it. It's only natural for him to develop some defensive mechanisms and idiosyncrasies in order to deal with always having the responsibility of having to take care of his brothers whenever they get hurt. He knows he needs to be professional and detached, but that doesn't mean he isn't going to start to question himself when he sees how hard his brothers are taking things while he's keeping his cool. This is just my take on how Don might deal with things and what he might think when he psychoanalyzes himself (which you know he does).

Also! To whoever nominated me for the various categories for the FanFic Competition, thank you so much! I was absolutely blown away, and I really appreciate the support. I love you guys, seriously.

On another note, I am bored! While I have some free time, I would love it if anyone who felt so inclined would fire off a challenge or plot bunny they don't want. I'm pumped up from all this bonding and character study, so if anyone has any Leo/Mikey brotherly bonding ideas, I'd be happy to take requests. :D

Please leave the overwhelmed college student some reviews; they are a doctor-recommended way of fighting off depression. Plus I

really like this piece, and I would love it if you told me you like it too. :D R&R, por favor! Gracias!